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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4224
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: KARIMOV TO BOUCHER: PROGRESS POSSIBLE, BUT NOT
UNDER SANCTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard B. Norland; reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary. Meeting at the Presidential Palace in Tashkent on June 2, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher and Uzbekistan President Islom Karimov agreed that the U.S. and Uzbekistan share important interests on Afghanistan, on political, economic and social progress in Uzbekistan, and on regional issues. Both sides expressed interest in rebuilding trust. Karimov, however, asserted that cooperation in all areas would be held up if the U.S. insisted on pressuring Uzbekistan on human rights by imposing visa sanctions related to Andijon. Boucher stressed that the U.S. needs to see more progress on human rights in order to address the concerns embodied in U.S. legislation that could impose sanctions by late June. Despite Karimov's protests, a prominent political prisoner was released on the day of Boucher's visit. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Participants:

Uzbekistan: President Islom Karimov, Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov
U.S.: Assistant Secretary Boucher, Ambassador Richard Norland, Senior Advisor Caitlin Hayden

Bilateral Relations, Human Rights and Sanctions

¶3. (S) Karimov began with a modestly upbeat accounting of recent improvements in bilateral relations. Constructive dialogue had led to improved trust, he said, and Uzbekistan was ready to take the next steps to consolidate and strengthen the relationship. The areas that united us were much stronger than the issues that divided us, he said -- "there are no insoluble problems in U.S.-Uzbek relations." The "pause" in relations after the 2005 Andijon event had not been Uzbekistan's fault. He found it hard to believe that relations could deteriorate so fast from the heyday of 2002 when he had been applauded in Congress, but he was prepared to move forward provided: (a) that each side took the other's

interests fully into consideration, and (b) that mutual trust be restored and relations be operated as a "two-way street."

¶4. (S) However, Karimov said he had to raise one "unpleasant" issue. Citing Boucher's comments to Foreign Minister Norov earlier in the day (septel) on U.S. legislation calling for visa sanctions, Karimov said it would be "counterproductive" to try to improve relations at the same time as Uzbekistan was kept under pressure. "Maybe you can deal with Belarus that way, but not with us," he said. The important issues Boucher had raised earlier with the Foreign Minister -- Afghanistan, regional issues, and so forth -- could only be addressed "when there is trust between us," Karimov said. "To constantly pressure us on democracy and human rights, to free criminals you call political prisoners, is absolutely unacceptable." He admitted Uzbekistan had problems in forming a democratic society and establishing human rights and a free press. These would take time to resolve, but ("unlike in Putin's Russia") Uzbekistan was determined to advance democracy -- "the only issue is at what speed."

¶5. (S) Drawing on a favorite theme, Karimov lambasted western "double standards" in the assessment of reform and human rights in Central Asia, saying it was "nonsense" to believe that Kazakhstan deserved to chair the OSCE given Nazarbayev's record on human rights. Uzbekistan did not deserve to be sanctioned, he stressed, reaffirming that the Andijon events of 2005 had been a terrorist act. (He later asserted that, if anything, the U.S. should impose sanctions on the whole region.) It would not work to combine the threat of sanctions with a desire to improve relations, Karimov stated -- "this is how Russia behaves." Uzbekistan wanted to work with the U.S. on Afghanistan and other issues, but "not at the expense of its interests."

¶6. (S) Assistant Secretary Boucher denied that the U.S. was applying double standards to Uzbekistan, noting that officials in other Central Asian states urged him "not to push us so hard, we're better than Uzbekistan." He stressed U.S. objectives in advancing the sovereignty and potential of each country in the region. It was not U.S. policy to apply pressure and hold out hope at the same time. Not all problems in Uzbekistan would be resolved in a short period, and there would always be some issues on which we disagreed, but his goal was progress in practical terms.

¶7. (C) Assistant Secretary Boucher outlined a three-part QendaQing stabilization of Afghanistan, intensification of bilateral relations (border security, counter-narcotics, non-proliferation, investment, education and human rights), and expanded cooperation on regional issues. He emphasized the importance of human rights, which were of interest not just to one agency or branch of the U.S. government but to all Americans. Just as the U.S. could not accept progress only on security at the expense of other issues like human rights, nor were we proposing to focus exclusively on human rights as if regional security threats did not matter. We wanted to move forward on all fronts in very practical ways. (Note: Boucher learned shortly after the meeting that prominent human rights activist Mutabar Tojiboyeva was released the same day -- on June 2 -- after serving three years of an eight-year prison sentence.)

¶8. (S) Karimov emphasized that he saw no contradiction between advancing security and human rights. He drew attention to his May 2 decree on an action plan to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He said sanctions would be an insult not only to him but to 27 million Uzbeks. "Forcing" democratic processes could cause backlashes, as with the election of Hamas. "What does it take to convince you that we are trying to become democratic?" Whereas he had been a product of the Soviet era, he said, today's young people showed none of the traits of that era. As Boucher himself had seen earlier in the day on his visit to Tashkent Islamic University, Karimov said, Uzbekistan was promoting not a "dictatorial Islam" but rather an "enlightened Islam," and he had spent much effort

on staffing this project with moderate faculty, not extremists.

Pakistan

¶9. (S) Karimov contrasted the study of secular subjects at Tashkent Islamic University with the situation in Pakistan. He lamented President Musharraf's current plight and expressed concern that Prime Minister Gilani and Nawaz Sharif would cut deals with Islamists that would turn the situation for the worse. The extremists were gaining strength, he estimated. It was therefore important to support Musharraf, and he praised President Bush's recent phone call as "very positive." In his view, the sequence of events could become irreversible -- "so when you say human rights contradict policy on security issues, this is wrong." Uzbekistan would work on human rights, but "consecutively, not spontaneously."

Afghanistan: 6 3

¶10. (S) Karimov painted a gloomy picture of developments in Afghanistan, positing that if the U.S. and NATO left then extremists in Pakistan and Iran would be emboldened. It was important for NATO to prevail, lest a destabilized Afghanistan cut off routes between Central Asia and the Indian Ocean. Likening himself to a chess player who thinks several steps ahead, Karimov estimated that Russia would do all it could to complicate matters for NATO, including fueling the Northern Alliance. Karimov said he would resist pressure to support the Alliance.

¶11. (S) Karimov said he had put forward the 6 3 proposal announced in Bucharest on April 4 in order to engage Afghanistan's neighbors more deeply in efforts to stabilize the situation. He gauged that Russia was against it but could not say so openly; that China was for it but would be equally reticent; and that Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were in favor each for its own reasons. He realized the U.S. was bothered by the absence of the Afghan government from this formula, but including them would defeat the purpose of 6 3. Karimov confirmed that 6 3 would operate under the aegis of the UN. "I really hope you will accept my game," he said, emphasizing that the engagement of nine neighboring countries could play a significant positive role ("do the math").

Regional Issues

¶12. (S) Karimov pushed his idea of a Central Asian common market but frowned on the Kazakh idea of a political union. He noted that China, both bilaterally and through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, was aggressively pursuing opportunities in the region. Its pipeline and railroad projects were aimed at securing influence 25-30 years down the road. Uzbekistan was skeptical of China's aims: "frankly, we understand what Chinese expansion is all about," Karimov said.

¶13. (S) Iran would be impossible to talk to once it secured nuclear weapons, Karimov said. "Formal approaches" were not effective, and he had stayed well clear of reciprocal visits with Iran since Ahmadinejad came to power. He expressed suspicion of efforts to create a Tajik-Persian union -- "not acceptable to us."

Returning to Bilateral Relations

¶14. (S) Karimov seemed to shift gears toward the end of the two-hour discussion, easing the negative, menacing tone he used to discuss sanctions. "Let me talk to you as a pragmatist," he said confidently. "I will support your line. I will carry out principled and important steps on key issues." His only "condition" was that we needed to draw the line under the situation that evolved between the two

countries after the Andijon events of 2005. (Comment: The implication was that relations could improve as long as we did not impose Andijon-related sanctions.) Drawing on local expressions, he said that "only a fool learns from his mistakes; a smart person learns from someone else's mistakes." Likewise, "a blind man loses his cane only once."

Karimov said he felt relations were on the brink of a pivotal, breakthrough moment. But we needed to use the situation wisely, leave "emotions" aside, and be pragmatic. "Your visit will be useful in all regards," he said enigmatically.

¶15. (S) Boucher said he agreed with much of what Karimov had just said, especially the need to rebuild trust. This was accomplished by doing the things each side promised, and doing things together. We could move on stabilizing Afghanistan, developing Uzbekistan in all its aspects, helping the countries of the region. The U.S. was in the region and would remain here. We were not out to get Hamas elected here or turn Uzbekistan into a Pakistan; rather, we sought to understand the directions Uzbekistan was headed in.

When we said we would do things, we would do them. We hoped to rebuild trust, Boucher said, adding that he was convinced more than ever that we had interests in common.

¶16. (S) Offering the last word, Karimov said he would listen closely to what Boucher had said and valued the comment that Boucher had come to gain a deeper understanding of Uzbekistan. "It's too bad this did not happen earlier," he observed, before "stereotypes" had set in. The East is a "delicate matter" and required deep engagement to be understood, Karimov said. He was glad that Boucher had paid this second visit in two years, and hoped he would come again. Escorting the Assistant Secretary outside, Karimov proposed more informal discussions in the future. "We will listen to you. We'll try to understand more deeply what you have told us. But the first thing is to regain trust."

¶17. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this message.
NORLAND